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The Councillor

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Edit this article: a Penn State 'Wiki'?

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Hi! My name is what? My name is who? My name is... Wiki Wiki Wikipedia!

First comes first: What's a Wiki? Wikipedia, commonly referred to as simply 'Wiki", is a free online encyclopedia that anyone can edit. It may sound strange, but this is an information revolution that has garnered strength and reputation since 2001. It allows entries to be posted and then for anyone with access to the internet the ability to edit it.

So what's this have to do with Penn State? Recently, legislation has been passed through the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) endorsing the implementation of a Penn State Wiki. George Chriss, of USG, who introduced and sponsored the project and legislation, fielded questions on the project in the Academic Affairs Committee meeting in CCSG on October 21st.

"It's quite a fascinating idea. You can go online and edit the content of any page at any time and the results are instantaneous. If you don't like what it says, think it could be improved, or think it could be updated, you can simply edit the page and save the changes for the next user," Chriss said.

The Penn State Wiki could be utilized in many contexts ranging from the history of Penn State, class and club information and work, to information regarding professors, courses, and teaching effectiveness.

George Chriss commented on the benefits of a webpage or a project like ANGEL compared to a Wiki, "When you have a webpage or some other project, you have one or two individuals updating a page and the information is then biased to those one or two people's viewpoints. The information would turn out to seem very polished and probably wouldn't be as comprehensive or beneficial to the needs of students," Chriss said.

Penn State Wiki Logo courtesy of George Chriss

The project comes with criticism. The idea of a Penn State site which leaves open room for racial/ethnic epithets as well as unfair criticism doesn't bode well to some.

The software package which Penn State would receive, Chriss said, would be authenticated by each person's user ID. Though it is viewable to the world, it cannot be edited unless you have an authentic PSU ID. In addition, the Penn State's software package would have a history page where you can see what changes and when you made them. Hypothetically, this factor would discourage people from writing unethical comments because the students would be suspended from the site and subsequently, referred to Judicial Affairs for reprimand.

Criticism is geared towards the excessive free-reign on editing which some people may abuse. The Penn State Wiki would have, like most Wikis, a 'report this page' and a 'report this user' button to send notice to the neutral, designated moderators of the project and 'clean up' the page. Most importantly, however, is the 'self-healing' power of the Wiki.

"There are more people that care about the quality of the article than those who don't. Once enough people begin using the Wiki program, there usually is a self-healing that takes place and if anything wrong, or unfairly biased, cruel, etc. is saved, usually it's fixed within minutes and taken off of the site," said George Chriss. The Penn State Wiki will have the option of interlinking the different campuses of Penn State. You can look up a specific topic and if it's discussed on a campus' Wiki section, which will come up in your search results. This could be useful in the class descriptions section where students would be able to research classes at different campuses before they schedule them.

Wiki's goal would not be to replace ANGEL. The project would provide another means for students to stay in contact with professors and vice versa.

According to Information Technology Services spokesperson Robin Anderson, Wiki would probably not be any cost to students.

Since the Penn State Wiki will affect the entire Penn State community, the Council of Commonwealth Student Governments will probably vote on a resolution regarding the Council's endorsement of the program at the next Council weekend.

A date for the implementation of the project is undetermined, but is anticipated to begin as early as spring semester.

The question of whether CCSG, the Commonwealth, and the Penn State community will support the implementation of Penn State Wiki will be decided, but George Chriss, students and many university officials believe we have an amazing opportunity to be one of the first Universities to utilize this concept.

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